

The Value of Web Marketing

The Internet is changing the rules of business. As trite as these words may seem now, they are true. Like radio and television, the Internet has brought about an undeniable shift in how business is conducted. Unlimited information, instantaneous communication, and a market more vast than anything before have become available to both massive conglomerates and small home businesses. However, one underlying factor remains the same: advertisement. While the traditional business plan of a "Brick and Mortar" company has always included extensive advertisement, the same cannot be said about many Internet businesses. Many webmasters go to great lengths to craft wonderful web sites, putting little or no thought into advertising them. And any business that doesn't advertise is doomed to failure. Web sites need to advertise and promote themselves to create traffic on their site, to stay in business, and to grow.

Businesses on the Internet share a kind of equality that Brick and Mortar businesses do not. When a visitor arrives at a website, they really have no idea how large or small that company may be. In the Brick and Mortar world, it is easy to distinguish between the two--the larger will have the bigger store, flashier advertising, and a more expansive inventory. On the Internet however, small companies can project an uncharacteristically large presence by creating and properly promoting their web sites. While the Brick and Mortar retail world is consolidating and merging towards giant discount oriented retailers, the Internet is teeming with thousands of small, successful companies who might not otherwise be able to compete, or even start-up, in the Brick and Mortar world.

No matter how large or small your company is, you need to advertise. Unfortunately for most small businesses, Dot-com or otherwise, traditional advertising methods require immense capital and human resources. This is exactly why many smaller businesses fail--they spend too many of their resources in trying to compete on somebody else's turf.

The most obvious medium of advertisement is television. However, television's effectiveness in attracting customers is questionable. Its effectiveness lies in achieving brand recognition. Yet at this point most businesses are trying to increase traffic to their websites and gain more customers--brand recognition can wait until after the IPO. Television advertising is also the most expensive medium. More than one previously unknown Dot-com spent all of their available resources on a Super Bowl spot. They may or may not have been successful, but nevertheless, they spent millions of dollars for 30 seconds of airtime. Most businesses are more shrewd when it comes to spending their dollars, and they want more than just thirty seconds of exposure.

If you thought that targeting an Internet-based audience would be more effective at driving traffic to a website, you would be right. Banner ads and mass-mailings are much less expensive than television. However, they have their limitations as well. While remarkably cheaper than a TV spot, a small banner ad on a major portal website can still cost over six thousand dollars a month. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that banners are not a cost effective way to bring visitors to a website. Most potential customers see banners as just a nuisance. Mass mailings have a similar drawback. If you opt out of spending money for your own list, you can buy space in someone else's. But you'll be competing for the customers attention with whoever else bought space. Another disadvantage that banner ads and mass-mailings have is that they aren't targeting the people who are most likely to be interested in the content you have to offer. They may reach a wide audience, but most of that audience will recoil in horror, yell "Spam!", and delete your expensive ad before having the opportunity to realize that you are exactly what they're looking for. While both traditional methods can and do work, they require a lot of what most of us don't have: money.

The most cost-effective advertisement would have to be both cheap and targeted at exactly the right customer. Years ago this was something of a pipe dream--today it is a reality. The Internet is the most comprehensive source of information in human history. But like any library of knowledge, it must be catalogued and organized to be used effectively. And therein lies the perfect solution: search engines. Like the card catalog of a library, search engines are a customer's way of sifting through the Web to filter out what they're looking for. And what better way to make sure you are found than to have an influence

on what they find? Search engine listings meet both of our criteria in terms of focus and affordability. No other form of advertising is so focused that the customer is actually searching for you. A search engine user is a highly receptive and targeted audience because you are not trying to sell them on something they don't already want. They have come looking for you and they already want what you specifically have to offer. Furthermore, the great majority of search engine listings are free. Return on investment couldn't be better-- with none of your dollars spent, the very first dollar returned is profit.

According to the Georgia Institute of Technology, 88% of Internet users find new web sites through search engine listings¹. WebCMO data shows that in a side-by-side comparison of different forms of promotion, search engine listings are the number one way to generate traffic on websites². Search engine listings send droves of visitors to your site and they are free. I have personally seen websites where traffic has increased ten-fold as a result of good search engine positioning. Nothing could be better, but there is a catch.

Getting listed on a search engine below 499 other websites simply won't work. You need to get a listing near the top of your category to collect all the traffic a search engine can deliver. But the good news is that you can dramatically improve your positioning with a little bit of elbow grease. All it takes is some key modifications to your website and a little thought. It's not that hard and you can do it. Using a program like AddWeb 4 to guide you through this process is the ideal way to simplify your work. It guides you through every aspect of the Search Engine Positioning process so you don't have to be a tech-savvy guru to get excellent results. With good search engine listings a small business can project a large image on the Internet and get the kind of traffic that so many big business sites get.

¹ Georgia Institute of Technology, Tenth WWW User Survey, October 1998

² WebCMO <http://www.webcmo.com/report/opss1/report1.htm>